The Signs That Distinguish a Living Church from a Dead One

To avoid being deceived, it is imperative to examine the signs by which we can distinguish a living Church cared for by Christ, from a dead one, where Christ is not involved in the growth of its members. (For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church. Ephesians 5:29)

It is of vital importance to know in which assembly we are, because our salvation will depend on it. Only in the Body of Christ is there real life where we grow as disciples of Christ through what every joint supplies, until we reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Him.

Scripture warns us of the danger we are in and tells us to beware of people/assemblies that claim to be with God but in reality are not. (Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing. Matthew 7:15)

It is necessary to carefully check whether the assembly we belong to has the characteristics of the Body of Christ, or not.

Regarding the human body, it is quite simple. The life of a member is strictly linked to the life of the body. We all know that when a person is dead, all the members of his body are dead.

There is no dead body with living members, nor a living body with dead members. If in a living body, a member dies and is not removed in time, it will gangrene the whole body. The same is true for the spiritual body. The Church/body where sin is tolerated has no life because Christ does not tolerate filth in His body. (He hath no part in me. John 14:30)

We warn not to be deceived that we can remain in a dead assembly where sin is tolerated, in order to be a light there, because there is no dead body with living members. A member is connected to other members from which it must receive and give further. If there were dead members in the body, what would they give to the living members and the living to the dead?

Scripture clearly states that if someone does not abide in the teaching of Christ, he is spiritually dead, that is, he does not have life from God. That one, may be a person, or an assembly. It cannot have life, because life comes only from Christ. (Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. 2 John 1:9; The Son quickeneth whom he will. John 5:21)

Do not be deceived! If in the Body of Christ (in the Church) a member dies and is not removed in time, it will gangrene the whole body! (Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. 1 Corinthians 5:6; see the case of the church in Thyatira, where the Lord Jesus says that he will kill her children with death...)

The Teaching of Christ

One of the signs by which we can verify if the Church is truly of Christ is the doctrine/teaching it accepts and practices.

When a Church does not have the teaching of Christ, it essentially disregards Christ, refusing His reign. (He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings. John 14:24; He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:4)

Therefore, it is extremely important to check if the teachings of the Lord Jesus are ignored/disregarded and not kept/unpracticed.

These teachings are meant to contribute to the restoration of God's image in us, to be able to dwell in eternity with the saints, with those who are like the image of His Son, people from the house of God. (Ephesians 2:19)

It is essential to understand that all the commandments of the Lord by which we must live are a faithful image of His character, of His being; they show us how He lived, they show us His ways. All, absolutely all His commandments, in fact, represent Him.

Therefore, we cannot neglect any commandment, because the traits of the Lord are found in His commandments. In every teaching of His, a trait of the Lord is hidden. Just as in the human embryo are hidden all the traits of the one who is to be born, so are the traits of the Lord Jesus, hidden in the seed ofGod. (The seed is the word of God. Luke 8:11)

The Holy Spirit uses these commandments and works with us to change us into the image of the Lord. (But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18)

One example is the Lord's teachings on non-resistance. (But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. Matthew 5:39-40; Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. Luke 6:30)

Only by keeping these words that teach us not to resist the one who does us harm, can longsuffering, kindness be cultivated in our characters... These are the character traits of the new man that are similar to those of the Lord. (The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. Psalms 145:8)

It can be easily observed that the Church/congregation that disregards Christ and does not remain in this teaching of His, will consent to the enlistment of its members in institutions that practice resistance and oath-taking (e.g., military, police, security and protection, etc.) as well as to the defending rights, through the use of means provided by the secular world. (e.g., Defending rights through justice for claims on buildings, lands, etc.)

Reality shows us that in this situation, today, many congregations belonging to various religious movements find themselves. Many are in or have been in lawsuits for their properties or rights.

Through these actions, they agree that their members should proceed in the same way when they have something to share with their peers, and by this, they encourage them to neglect the teachings of the Lord that lead to the formation of the image of Christ in man.

The Body of Christ

Another sign by which we can check if the Church has Christ as its head, are the teachings and practice regarding the relationships of the members of the Body of Christ.

1. The scattered flock The assembly that disregards and does not practice the teaching of a closely knit, well-coalesced body, in which each member must have his role given by God for the spiritual benefit of the others, does not have Christ. (From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:16)

2. In such assemblies, God has been set aside, not being allowed to form the body and to place the members in the body as He wishes. (But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1 Corinthians 12:18) many souls that no one cares for, to whom no one holds accountable, where submission, reproof, and discipline are unpracticed.

If the Church does not watch and check if the members seek the benefit of the other members, that assembly does not have Christ. (Let no man seek his own, but every

man another's wealth. 1 Corinthians 10:24)

Where there is a living Church, the members care for one another. (That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; 1 Corinthians 12:24-26)

You can do a test in your assembly: If a Whether one member member suffers from a spiritual or physical suffer, all the members illness, how many members care for him? None, suffer with it one/two, or all the members?

The assembly that is structured and organized in such a way that it only requires its members to attend worship 2-3 times a week, does not have Christ as its head. Where the vast majority of members are only consumers of religious programs, that assembly is not of Christ.

Through this kind of organization, the members are not asked to participate in the life of the body/family, that of being for the benefit of the other members, thus promoting self-love, where everyone is concerned with their own concerns and personal interests.

3. Brotherly submission Another sign by which we can check if the Church has Christ as its head, is the acceptance and practice of the teachings regarding brotherly submission.(Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account. Hebrews 13:17; Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. 1 Peter 5:5)

We can verify: If the Church belongs to Christ, the members live in obedience to Christ and to their spiritual fathers. (Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:21)

If the Church belongs to Christ, it will practice the punishment of those who out of pride do not submit to the elders of the assembly (And if he shall neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matthew 18:17).

It can be easily observed that, where there is the phenomenon of a scattered flock, those in authority do not demand obedience. (obedience has no object, it cannot be practiced).

4. The Purity of the Church Another sign by which we can verify if the Church has Christ as its head, are the teachings regarding the purity of the Church.

Thus, the assembly that disregards and does not uphold the teaching that instructs us to watch so that no one is worldly, in practice disregards Christ and His body. (...lest there be any fornicator, or profane person… looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God. Hebrews 12:15,16)

Also, it can be verified if reproof and discipline are disregarded, if they are not put into practice. (Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault… but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matthew 18:15, 17)

Check if the Church you belong to promotes the teaching that says in the Church/His Body there are both children of light/wheat and children of darkness/tares.

By this, the Lord's teaching is disregarded, which says that children of light cannot dwell together with children of darkness and the clear teaching that says the tares are sown in the field, which is the world, not the Church! (What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15; The field is the world. Matthew 13:38)

The fruit of this teaching is the toleration of sin, the leaven that leavens the whole lump/the death of the flock. (Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? (1 Corinthians 5:6)

This post is an excerpt from the booklet "The Church – The Body of Christ", which you can read in full, free of charge. More studies and resources for spiritual awakening are available at https://www.unmodifiedword.com.